

Pomfret (J. E.)

ALBANY MEDICAL COLLEGE.

ADDRESS

BY

JAS. E. POMFRET, M. D.

Box 6

ALBANY MEDICAL COLLEGE.

ADDRESS,

INTRODUCTORY TO

THE COURSE OF 1868,

BY

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JAMES E. POMFRET, M. D.,

PROFESSOR OF PHYSIOLOGY.

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ALBANY MEDICAL COLLEGE, *Sept. 11, 1868.*

PROF. POMFRET :

Dear Sir — The Class of '68, appreciating the merit of your Opening Address, called a meeting, J. A. WILBUR in the Chair, at which it was resolved to request a copy of the manuscript for publication, and the undersigned were appointed a committee for that purpose.

Hoping that you will confer the favor requested,

We remain, Sir,

Your most obedient servants,

H. D. LOSEE, *Chairman.*

JULIUS J. KEMPE,

M. B. FAIRCHILD,

J. A. FRISBEE,

W. G. TUCKER,

J. V. R. HOFF,

Committee.

A. MACKIE, Jr., *Secretary.*

ALBANY, *Sept. 12, 1868.*

GENTLEMEN :

Your letter, conveying a resolution of the Class requesting a copy of my Address for publication, is before me. It gives me pleasure to comply, and to place the manuscript at your disposal.

With kind regards,

I am, gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES E. POMFRET.

To Messrs. H. D. LOSEE, JULIUS J. KEMPE, M. B. FAIRCHILD, J. A. FRISBEE,
W. G. TUCKER, and J. V. R. HOFF, Committee, &c.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN :

The pleasant duty has been assigned me of welcoming you to this, the opening of the thirty-seventh course of lectures in this Institution. The importance of the studies that will engage your attention; the character of the Institution, which, for a quarter of a century, has been sending forth its students to fill places of honor and trust; the faculty, now gathered immediately around me, many of whom were my own teachers and the teachers of my preceptor; men who have received the highest medical honors of the State and the nation; all alike remind me of the honorable duty to which I have been assigned, and all alike indicate the requirements which that duty imposes. And yet, I repeat, that my duty to day is a pleasant duty. Pleasant, notwithstanding its requirements; for I am to introduce some of you to that noble profession to which you are henceforth to dedicate the best powers of your minds; certain, that, however great my shortcomings, I shall receive generous consideration, both from my professional associates and from yourselves.

For I venture to affirm, gentlemen, that, in human affairs, there is no nobler profession; none which has had an older growth; none which has engaged nobler intellects; none which has a wider sweep; none which has contributed more to human comfort and advancement; none which has stronger hold on human confidence, and none which promises more for the full and harmonious development of its earnest followers, than the one in the interests of which we gather here to day.

Nor are these empty assertions, the mere rhetorical grouping of fine phrases, they are weak in that they do not cover enough; that they lack both the strength and the point to suitably express the dignity, the vitality and the beneficence of our profession.

Let me endeavor to make this plain. Confidence, so fully enunciated, must have good foundation for its justification; eulogy, so comprehensive, must be able, in the solid substratum of overpowering conviction, to find its justification. Upon what grounds, then, do we rest our justification for the exalted and benevolent place we claim for Medical Science and Art.

The first ground upon which I found the claim for this place is, that our profession is the outgrowth of the best efforts of earnest medical men in all ages.

I shall not enter into any lengthy historical disquisition to prove the position I have stated; the merest sketch will as fully necessitate it, as the most minute analysis.

Medical History, from the shadowy outlines of Egyptian and Indian art, to the most minute and comprehensive discovery of our own times, teaches us that our profession is the product of no single mind, or age. As we trace the stream down through successive periods, we see how, from innumerable sources, it has received those accessions which have deepened and broadened its swelling flood. Not always flowing directly onward, not always free from eddies which apparently brought it back to some point long since supposed to be passed; it has, nevertheless, received constant accessions; now, from the faithful observation of Hippocrates; and now from the orderly classification of the learned Galen; and continually from innumerable hands, until in our own century it gathers its contributions from the Sciences which it has arranged and from the Arts which it has made possible. It has thus slowly, but continually improved, and being in its numbers a living force, it is still capable of further advancement.

The medical profession is then no mere mechanical picking up of what some earnest enthusiast may have deemed best, but is an outgrowth of the observation and effort of the race. It is as firmly rooted as is our civilization; is indeed one leading expression of that civilization, and is also to-day as it has been for centuries, the chief source from which its forces were derived.

The vital force of our profession may be seen from another point of view. History is careful of great names. The man that fills the newspapers to-day is done up in a paragraph next month and is forgotten in a year. The ruler of a great nation fills but half a page in the Biographical Dictionary of a century;

and when an epoch is in review, names follow each other like those in a modern directory. Now, there are great names in the past of our Profession; names that have in them as much of historical immortality as is in those heroes and sages the world embalms and holds in precious memory. Hippocrates and Galen are on no inferior pinnaele. They look out from the dim past as calmly, grandly and imperishably, as Homer or Cicero. And Harvey, Priestley and Black are as sure of a place in history, as Bacon, Galileo or Newton. And accompanying these is the august procession of far-sighted and beneficent men, who, from the dawn of civilization, have marched through the ages, the embodiment of the wisdom, the expression of the philanthropy and the prophets of the hope of every land and time.

Growing out of this natural development, and supporting the estimate of the profession I have given you, is the way in which its followers are fitted for their work. Perhaps in no one thing is the line between every form of quackery and the profession more clearly drawn than in this.

You have come here, gentlemen, as thousands of other students will assemble this fall, to gain some knowledge of the human body and of the best means of preserving and restoring its health. Now, I venture to say, there is not one of you, from the time you first entered your name as a student of medicine, until now, that ever have had the slightest limit placed to your most earnest inquiries.

No Procrustean bed of theory has limited your investigations in the slightest degree; no dogmas have interposed between you and the domain you would traverse. The truth is, gentlemen, you are in the Republic of letters—in the broad domain of unfettered investigation. No passports are required, for there is no rank but worth, and no limit but the truth.

So, too, of the medical teaching which will extend to you its helping hand, in this institution. The wealth of experience which the gentlemen who will meet you in the various departments possess; together with the accumulated experience of ages history has placed at their hands, will be truly invaluable. And yet, you will find that it is not used as a despotic guide to be blindly followed; but is so used and illustrated that *you* may be *self-guided*. The value of much that you will learn is not so much that in the hands of this or that professor it has been

successful; but in that it enables *you* to be successful by mastering the conditions upon which his success was founded. It is true that in all art the pupil must follow the master; and in an art the foundations of which are yet by no means perfected; especially on its practical side, it is most especially true; while it is also equally true that art, having its foundation in science, can be used with precision only as its foundation is fully known.

And so will it be, gentlemen, when you leave these halls and go into the homes of men. The responsibilities as the rewards of our profession are eminently *personal*. It is rare that you will be able really to divide your responsibility with another. The case, its treatment and results will, in a very significant sense, be yours. To be fitted for this responsibility is no mean preparation. Certainly, one of its conditions is—a condition now fully recognized by the profession—that of the liberty of the individual practitioner. No other practitioner can impose his practice upon you any more than he can his mental traits. The loyalty then of the medical man is not to other medical men, but to the science and art of the profession. He who falls short of his very best in bringing the last store of science, the last resource of art, to the aid of his patient, is false to the noble opportunity of his profession, as he is to the very pith of his manhood.

So thoroughly permeated is the profession with this sense of loyalty to its science and art, that I think I do not state the case too strongly when I say that no statement could stand, however exalted the position of its maker, unless supported by such demonstration as to commend it to acceptance without any name whatever.

The literature of the profession everywhere illustrates this. The exactness of definition; the fullness of historical statement; the particulars of the surroundings; the steps taken in the process, in their order and conditions; everything that relates to the case must be clearly told, or it is useless. The information must be such that other men can verify its results, or it passes as an empty sound, and is forgotten.

But I not only justify the exalted place I have assigned to medicine by its order of development and its method of study, but by its attainments both as a science and an art.

It was the *Physician*, Sanctoria of Italy, who invented the Thermometer; it was Dr. Black who demonstrated that the atmosphere was not a simple substance, and who first separated the gas, carbonic acid. It was Dr. Priestley, in the discovery of oxygen, who put an end to the old theories and laid the foundation of modern Chemistry, by which man has opened the storehouse of nature, and since then revelled in its luxuries.

Of its vast practical consequences, Prof. Liebig observes: "Since the discovery of oxygen, the civilized world has undergone a revolution in manners and customs. The knowledge of the composition of the atmosphere, of the solid crust of the earth, of water, and of their influence upon the life of plants and animals was linked with that discovery. The successful pursuit of innumerable trades and manufactures; the profitable separation of metals from their ores, also stand in the closest connection therewith. It may well be said that the material prosperity of empires has increased manifold since the time oxygen became known, and the fortune of every individual has been augmented in proportion."

It was Dr. Galvani who discovered animal electricity, and Lavoisier and Dalton that first classified the vast phenomena of chemistry. It was Dr. Draper who first arranged the conditions of successfully Daguerreotyping animated objects. What other profession has made contributions to the welfare of mankind equal to these? and these are but random specimens. From what sources, other than medical, have mankind drawn a sum equal to this?

Nor has more faithful use been made of the appliances offered, than in the profession of Medicine. Its laws of light have given us the Microscope, the Ophthalmoscope, the Laryngiscope and numerous other instruments, for learning the condition of organs hidden from unaided sight. The appliances of Aural and Optical Surgery are as beneficent as they are wonderful.

Where have greater improvements been made than in the addition to the agencies for controlling diseases we have in our alkaloids, in morphia and quinia, or who will tell us the value of ether and chloroform?

I know that in high scientific places, it has been fashionable to sneer at modern medicine; at the imperfection of both its science

and its art, and I frankly concede that there is yet room for work ; but what science is yet perfected ?

Mathematics and mechanics are certainly old enough to have attained some measure of perfection, and yet they cannot produce a clock which can keep time ; indeed they cannot produce two clocks, which, made on the same principle, and by the same man, and run under the same conditions, will give the same measure of time. They, only, are the finished sciences, which can be perfected in thought. When the hand of man is called on to execute the scientific plan, the imperfection that attaches to all human art is at once visible. And it is only as we limit the boundaries of any particular science we can say they are perfect. They are *but parts* of one grand plan.

It is only as astronomy is limited to motion and distance, that accuracy is obtained ; and even then the probable error is quite a sum ; and this sum will differ, as the personal equations of the observers differ, in any two observations of the same object, made at the same time.

So is it in medicine. In its application in the healing art there is still room for skill and care ; but it is no more a reproach to medicine, that such is the case, than that the discrepancy I have named, is a reproach to the exact and splendid science of astronomy.

It is only quackery that has finished its systems, and exhausted the universe.

I would further justify the exalted estimate I have given of the profession by its wide sweep of usefulness and influence.

To cure the sick is certainly the first duty of the physician ; but his opportunities and influence by no means end there. There is a large field for activity outside of the cure of the sick.

As examples I may mention hygiene. The control of that epidemic of cholera in New York, was in a leading sense due to the physicians of the board of health. So of the threatened cattle disease ; so of innumerable examples constantly occurring in all civilized countries. The protection of the public health in the sanitary laws established by physicians, is one of the grandest features of modern civilization.

The indebtedness of society, and at the same time the wide scope of our profession, are shown in its contributions to Medico-

Legal Enquiries. In infanticide; in death from violence; in cases of poisoning; and in many other ways the profession is constantly contributing to the safety of society.

One of the most remarkable manifestations of modern society; in which its most dependent members are deeply interested; and one which gives to thousands comfort and security impossible other than by its aid, is directly dependent upon the perfection of medical science in diagnosis. I refer to Life Insurance. The application of medical skill in the determination of the physical status of the applicant, is essential to the success of this rapidly extending method of insurance.

So too in the treatment of the whole subject of insanity and idiocy—in all their important relations to the family and the state—we have added evidence of the wide sweep of our profession; and here I might allude to the influence of physiology on the discussion of the most profound questions of philosophy; and the many and important modifications its discoveries in the nervous system, have already produced.

And just here, gentlemen, let me call your attention to one result of this broad spirit. You will often meet with champions of professedly successful quackery. Looking over the entire field of human activity, in these numerous spheres of usefulness, can you name one of the entire brood of medical pretenders who has contributed a single idea or appliance to any of them?

Thus, for thousands of years, have earnest men toiled to lay broad and deep the foundations of our Profession. In every country, using all languages; in every form of civilization; through all the changes that have attended the rise and fall of many nations; looking with earnest gaze; working with tireless hands; hoping with undaunted hearts; gaining now a fact, and now a remedy; outgrowing superstition; outliving false theories; bursting the bonds of ignorance; inventing the appliances its growth demanded; year by year, century after century, pushing out its rootlets, extending its branches; the earnest, honest, beneficent toil of all the past, blooms and fruits in the profession of to-day.

Thus far, gentlemen, I have called your attention to what the profession of medicine is in itself. Let me have your attention while I consider the place to be assigned it when regarded as to its

influence on the medical man himself, individually; it is in *this* we are all most deeply interested. What kind of men does medical work produce?

The best opportunity an individual can have, is that in which all his powers have free play, and abundant opportunity.

What better opportunity can be had for personal culture than that our profession affords. Looked at from its scientific side, the ample room afforded for accuracy of observation, for subtlety of analysis, for comprehension of law, for delicacy of manipulation, insure to the earnest student the fullest culture of every power of the mind. Looked at from the side of art, its influence on the individual is equally potent. Brought constantly face to face with the gravest responsibilities, called to meet the most sudden emergencies, there is inevitably produced in him a thorough self-possession, a quickness of apprehension, and a fertility of resource compatible only with most perfect culture.

When to these are added the generous sympathies, the lasting friendships and the enlarged and exalted views of human nature sure to grow out of a faithful performance of medical work, I feel that I have in this meager outline indicated something of its value to its followers.

But, gentlemen, higher than all attainments, better than all skill, more enduring than all friendships, is that grandest of all opportunities, the growth of character. What we may have, what we may do, sink into insignificance when weighed against what we are! Is there any profession which can incite to noble living more than that of ours? In which every day the real value of life and all its possessions are set more clearly before us?

I miss, gentlemen, from those around me, one familiar face.

Since our last course of lectures, the able Professor; the faithful Trustee; the generous citizen; the genial friend; the noble man, AMOS DEAN, has died. From its foundation and for twenty years a Professor in this college, and until his death a Trustee; from the character of his teaching—medical jurisprudence; from his constant intercourse with his associates, and from the pursuit of studies which required much knowledge of medicine, Prof. DEAN may well be regarded as expressing, in his life and character, many of the results of medical culture. Certainly, I am justified in using his honored name to illustrate

the highest excellence in our profession—the production of noble character.

What was it that shrouded our city in gloom when he died ; that filled our streets with mourners as they had never before been filled, when his remains were carried to the tomb ? It was not his learning, for the unlearned mourned him ! It was not his profession, for all professions and pursuits did honor to his memory. It was not his church, for all churches had their members at his grave. It was no civil pageant, no social brotherhood, for he was in private life and living in one grand pursuit. It was the purity, the nobleness, the beauty of his character. Character which when all possessions are dross, leaves its fragrant perfume in our dust.

